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ABSTRACT

Although social networks play an important role in supporting families under stress, there is some evidence that families living a stressful dual career life style may have limited network resources. To describe support networks of dual career couples and to examine the relationship between the supportiveness of the network and satisfaction with the marriage and life style, 52 dual career couples completed a mail survey. Participants were recruited from a large university faculty, were well educated, and had been married an average of 18 years. The questionnaire consisted of questions about satisfaction with the marriage and life style, satisfaction with the support network, and demographics. Results indicated that, in general, members of the support network comprised a heterogeneous group. The networks contained relatives, co-workers and friends, other dual career couples as well as single provider couples, and opposite-sex as well as same-sex individuals. Analysis of the relationship between supportiveness and satisfaction showed husbands were more satisfied when their networks were perceived to be supportive, while wives were more satisfied when their networks were perceived as close and satisfying. Limited frequency of contact and distance did not hamper the maintenance of supportive relationships. Results indicate the importance of the quality and supportiveness of the network for satisfaction. (JAC)

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SUPPORT NETWORKS OF DUAL CAREER COUPLES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, the support networks of dual career couples were described in terms each member's relationship to the couple, occupation, gender, frequency of interaction with the couple, and type of interaction. Second, the relationship between the supportiveness of the network and satisfaction with the dual career marriage and lifestyle was examined. It was hypothesized that supportiveness of the network would be positively related to satisfaction with the marriage, and to satisfaction with the dual career lifestyle. Supportiveness of the network was conceptualized as consisting of the dimensions of closeness, satisfaction and support.

Fifty-two dual career couples completed a mailed survey that assessed the characteristics of their support networks. Results indicated that in general, members of the support network comprised a heterogeneous group of individuals. These support networks contained relatives as well as co-workers and friends, other dual career couples as well as traditional (single provider) couples, and opposite-sex as well as same-sex individuals. Several interesting gender differences appeared in the analysis of the relationship between supportiveness and satisfaction. Husbands were more satisfied when their networks were perceived to be supportive, whereas wives were more satisfied when their networks were perceived to be close and satisfying.

SUPPORT NETWORKS OF DUAL CAREER COUPLES

Social networks play an important role in supporting families that are under stress (Unger & Powell, 1980). Indeed, the role of the network in mediating stress has been noted repeatedly during times of natural disaster, war and family crisis (Drabek & Boggs, 1968; Erikson, 1976; Gore, 1974; Hill, 1949). The supportive role of the social network is not limited, however, to times of extreme crisis. Network support has been found to enhance the family's adaptation to "normal" stresses associated with careers, pregnancy, life transitions, etc. (Burke & Weir, 1977; Hirsch, 1980; Nuckolls, Cassel & Kaplan, 1972). Unger and Powell (1980) note that social networks play a "critical role" in such adaptation; in addition, a supportive network may serve to enhance well being and adjustment.

An emergent lifestyle that is particularly stressful is the dual career lifestyle. The presence of stress has been a common thread that runs throughout the literature on the dual career family (Epstein, 1971; Holohan & Gilbert, 1979; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1978). Such stress is not limited to only one aspect of this lifestyle, but rather tends to emanate from both internal (arising within the family) and external (resulting from the dual career family's interaction with other social institutions) sources (Bebbington, 1973). Examples of these stressors include problems with overload, role-cycling issues, and occupational dilemmas (Skinner, 1980).

There is some evidence that dual career families may have limited network resources. The maintenance of social relationships seems to be problematic for dual career couples, due to time constraints and geographic mobility (Skinner, 1980). In addition, network support is limited in that

kin, neighbors and co-workers are unlikely to maintain similar lifestyles and career aspirations (Darley, 1976). However, despite such limited network support, dual career couples generally do not appear to be any less satisfied with their lifestyles or their marriages than are traditional couples (Booth, 1977).

It may be that what is important to the dual career couple is not the number of friends or social relationships they maintain, but rather the perceived supportiveness of their primary network members. The pressence of close, satisfying and supportive relationships could enhance the dual career family's adaptation to its unique stresses. Such adaptation would in turn enhance the couple's feelings of well-being, for as Skinner (1980) notes, the stresses associated with the dual career lifestyle are presumed to have an impact on the marriage itself. Thus, the perception of a supportive network could be related to both satisfaction with the marriage and satisfaction with the dual career lifestyle.

The purpose of the present study was twofold. First the social networks of dual career couples were described. Rather than describe the entire network in terms of number of friends, density, etc., we chose to examine those individuals perceived as supportive. These supportive network members were described in terms of their relationships to the couple, occupation, gender, type of interaction, and frequency of interaction. Second, the relationship between the supportiveness of the network and satisfaction with the dual career lifestyle and marriage was examined. Supportiveness was described in terms of three dimensions: how close the participant felt to the network members, how satisfying the network

relationships were, and how much support the members provided. It was hypothesized that each of these dimensions would be positively related to satisfaction with the dual career lifestyle and marriage.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited from the faculty at a large Northwestern University. A total of 52 dual career couples participated in this study. These couples had been married on the average 18.16 years (ranging from 1 to 44 years). Average ages of these husbands and wives were 45.65 and 43.88, respectively. Modal education for the husbands was a doctorate, and for the wives a master's degree. On the average, husbands had spent 10.80 and wives had spent 6.59 years in their current positions.

Measures

Data for the study were collected by means of a questionnaire designed to examine the composition of the network and general life satisfaction. This questionnaire consisted of three sections. First, the participants answered questions on satisfaction with the dual career lifestyle and on marital satisfaction. These questions were patterned after the life satisfaction questions developed by Campbell, Converse and Rodgers (1976). Each question was accompanied by a one to seven scale of "completely dissatisfied" to "completely satisfied."

Second, participants described their support networks. Participants were asked to describe the six individuals who provided them with the most support. Each member was described in terms of network information and in terms of the three dimensions of support. Network information

included the network member's gender and occupation, relationship to the respondent, the most typical type of interaction with the member (individually versus as a couple), and the frequency of interaction. The three dimension questions assessed how close the respondent felt to each network member, how satisfying the relationship with each member was, and how supportive each member of the network was. Each of these three questions was accompanied by a one to seven scale of "not at all" to "very much."

Finally, each participant answered demographic and background questions. These items assessed the participant's age, gender, education, employment status, length of marriage, number of children and length of time in current position.

Procedure

The participants for this study were recruited in the following manner. A systematic random sample of 225 was taken from a list of all married assistant, associate and full professors at the university. Two copies of the questionnaire, along with a cover letter, were sent to each faculty member through inter-campus mail. Spouses were asked to complete their questionnaires separately, and to return them separately through inter-campus mail in the preaddressed envelope that had been provided.

At least one partner of 56% of the couples sampled had completed and returned the questionnaire after the second mailing. This represented 80 couples and 47 individual spouses. Of the 80 couples who completed the questionnaire, 65% were dual career couples. Thus, the final sample consisted of 52 dual career couples, who had at least one spouse employed at the university.

Results and Discussion

Description of the Supportive Network

A total of 589 network members were described; 283 members were described by the husbands, and 306 members were described by the wives. There was a slight tendency for the supportive network members described to be the same gender as the respondent (see Table 1). The largest proportion of these network members, for both husbands and wives, were relatives. Indeed, 49 of the husbands and 51 of the wives mentioned their spouses as one of their supportive network members. Approximately one-fourth of the husband's network and one-third of the wife's network were friends. Co-workers also comprised a sizable proportion of both husbands' and wives' support networks. Clearly, these dual career couples did not restrict their descriptions of supportive network members to one type of individual, but perceived support from colleagues and friends as well as relatives.

The respondents also indicated the occupations of the members of their support networks. From this, it was ascertained whether the support network was comprised of other dual career couples, non-dual career couples or single individuals. The largest proportion of network members for both husbands and wives were other dual career couples (see Table 1). However, dual career couples did not comprise a majority of the networks. Nearly 60% of both husbands' and wives' networks consisted of non-dual career couples (single provider families, dual work couples) and single individuals. Thus, these dual career couples did not limit their descriptions of supportive

Table 1

Description of Support Networks of
Dual Career Couples

	Percentage of Network Members	
	Husbands' networks	Wives' networks
Gender		
Same-sex	53%	57%
Opposite-sex	47%	43%
Relationship to respondent		
Relative (local)	30%	28%
Relative (non-local)	18%	17%
Friend (local)	17%	23%
Friend (nonlocal)	8%	9%
Co-worker	27%	23%
Occupation of network members		
Dual career couples	43%	38%
Non-dual career couples	33%	32%
Single individuals	24%	30%
Type of interaction		
Individually	47%	52%
As a couple	53%	48%
Frequency of interaction		
Daily	40%	36%
Weekly	31%	32%
Monthly	18%	21%
Less than once a month	11%	12%

network members to dual career couples, but rather felt supported by individuals and couples whose lifestyles were quite diverse. Previous studies have noted that dual career couples tend to socialize mainly with other dual career couples, and have also noted that normative support is best gained from other dual career couples. The present study demonstrates however, the differences between a general assessment of the network and an assessment of supportive network members. When describing supportive individuals, these dual career couples clearly felt supported by a wide variety of couples and individuals. It appears that the perception of supportive network members extended beyond individuals who provided normative support or individuals who served as role models to include other types of supportive people. Possibly, the most important type of support provided to these dual career couples by their networks was emotional or affectional rather than normative.

These dual career husbands and wives interacted both individually and as a couple with their support networks (see Table 1). Both spouses indicated that they interacted with about half of their support network members on an individual basis, and with about half as a couple. The majority of the supportive network members were interacted with on a daily or weekly basis. However, it is interesting to note that 29% of the husbands' networks and 33% of the wives' networks were interacted with once a month or less. This was due to the fact that both local and non-local friends and relatives were included in the support networks.

Overall, the picture that emerges of these support networks is one of diversity. Both husbands and wives included a wide variety of individuals

in their support networks. It appeared also that frequent interaction and residence in the same community were not prerequisites for the perception of supportiveness. Nearly one-fourth of these support networks were comprised of non-local friends and relatives who were interacted with less than once a month. This phenomenon is important, in that lack of time and geographic mobility have been seen to be problematic with regards to maintaining social relationships for dual career couples (Skinner, 1980). Clearly, in the present study, limited frequency of contact and distance did not hamper the maintenance of supportive relationships.

The Perception of Supportiveness and Satisfaction

Each member of the support network was described in terms of how close the respondent felt to that network member, how satisfying the relationship with that network member was, and how much support the member provided. The scores for each member of the newtork were averaged to yield mean closeness, satisfaction and supportiveness scores for the network. These three scores were then correlated with satisfaction with the dual career lifestyle, and satisfaction with the marriage.

For the dual career husbands, there were significant positive correlations between satisfaction with the dual career lifestyle and closeness to the network members, and between satisfaction with the lifestyle and supportiveness of the network. For the dual career wives, satisfaction with the dual career lifestyle correlated significantly with closeness of the network and with network relationship satisfaction. The correlation between lifestyle satisfaction and supportiveness was not significant for the wives (see Table 2).

Table 2

Correlations Between Support Dimensions and Satisfaction

	Satisfaction with the dual career lifestyle	Satisfaction with the marriage
	Husbands	
Closeness to network members	.26 *	.20
Satisfaction with network relationships	.22	.34 **
Supportiveness of network members	.28 *	.41 ***
	Wives	
Closeness to network members	.47 ***	.53 ***
Satisfaction with network relationships	.39 **	.55 ***
Supportiveness of network members	.00	.11

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

In terms of marital satisfaction, there were significant positive relationships between marital satisfaction and network relationship satisfaction, and between marital satisfaction and supportiveness of the network for the husbands. Wives' marital satisfaction correlated positively with closeness to the network and with network relationship satisfaction. Once again, the supportiveness of the network was not significantly related to the marital satisfaction of the wives (see Table 2).

Overall, the most striking findings are those that contrast the husbands and wives. First, supportiveness was significantly related to satisfaction for the husbands, but not for the wives. Second, closeness and network relationship satisfaction were more strongly related to satisfaction for the wives than for the husbands. The latter phenomenon ties in well with previous research that has discussed the increased interpersonal sensitivity and the expressive role of females (Hill, Rubin & Peplau, 1976; Parsons & Bales, 1955). One would expect the wives to be more aware of and in tune with the quality of their interpersonal relationships; such assessments of quality were obviously related in the present study to feelings of satisfaction.

The differences between these dual career husbands and wives in terms of the supportiveness of the network are quite surprising. For the same reasons cited above, it would be expected that wives would be more in tune with the supportiveness of the network. However, the supportiveness of the network did not contribute to the lifestyle or marital satisfaction of the wives, but did contribute to the lifestyle and marital satisfaction of the husbands. Perhaps this finding is due to the structure of the dual

career marriage itself. In traditional marriages, domestic and work roles are sharply differentiated; this allows the wife to provide total support to the husband as he pursues his career (Hunt & Hunt, 1977). In the dual career situation, due to time and role demands, the wife may not be able to provide full time support to her husband's career. Perhaps the presence of network support helps to "make up" for this decreased spousal support for the husband, and thus helps to enhance his feelings of satisfaction. Such an explanation of the results of this study remain as conjecture, however, as the relationship between the supportiveness of the network and satisfaction is not known for husbands and wives who have traditional (single provider) marriages.

An additional explanation of the differential relationship between supportiveness and satisfaction for these husbands and wives lies in gender differences in support networks in general. Studies of divorce have demonstrated that women tend to have more supportive networks than do men (Bloom & Hodges, 1981; White & Bloom, 1981). It could be that women take the supportiveness of their networks as a matter of course, and thus are more concerned with the closeness and satisfactoriness of the network rather than its supportiveness. Men, on the other hand, lacking well defined support networks in general, may feel greatly enhanced in terms of their satisfaction with life when such supportiveness is present. The results of this study clearly support such an explanation.

In summary, the results of this study indicated the practicality of describing social networks in terms of their supportiveness. This assessment of the support networks of dual career couples gave a much

different picture of the network than have studies that have taken a more traditional approach to the study of the network. The largest difference appeared to be that assessing the support network gives a more heterogeneous picture of the network than previous studies have painted (cf. Rapoport & Rapoport, 1968).

In addition, the results of this study point to the impact the quality and supportiveness of the network have on satisfaction. It appeared that a supportive network did indeed enhance the satisfaction of husbands, while a close and satisfying network enhanced the satisfaction of wives. Future study would do well to concentrate on husband-wife differences in the perception of network support, and on the differential factors that contribute to the lifestyle and marital satisfaction of dual career couples.

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